

6EW

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 03239 4162

Gc 978.902 L339a

Arrott, James W.

Arrott's brief history of
Fort Union

✓

Arrott's Brief History of Fort Union



HERTZOG/Lowman 142

OM
47

Arrott's Brief History of Fort Union

*Edited from a tape recording of an Address
delivered by*

JAMES W. ARROTT

at New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas

on July 15, 1957

with Foreword and additional material by

WILLIAM S. WALLACE



RODGERS LIBRARY • HIGHLANDS UNIVERSITY

LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO

1962

Allen County Public Library
900 Webster Street
PO Box 2270
Fort Wayne, IN 46801-2270

COPYRIGHT, 1962

By W. S. WALLACE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



PRINTED BY CARL HERTZOG
FOR THE RODGERS LIBRARY

Limited Edition — 300 copies
Curtis Utopian Natural Wove

FOREWORD

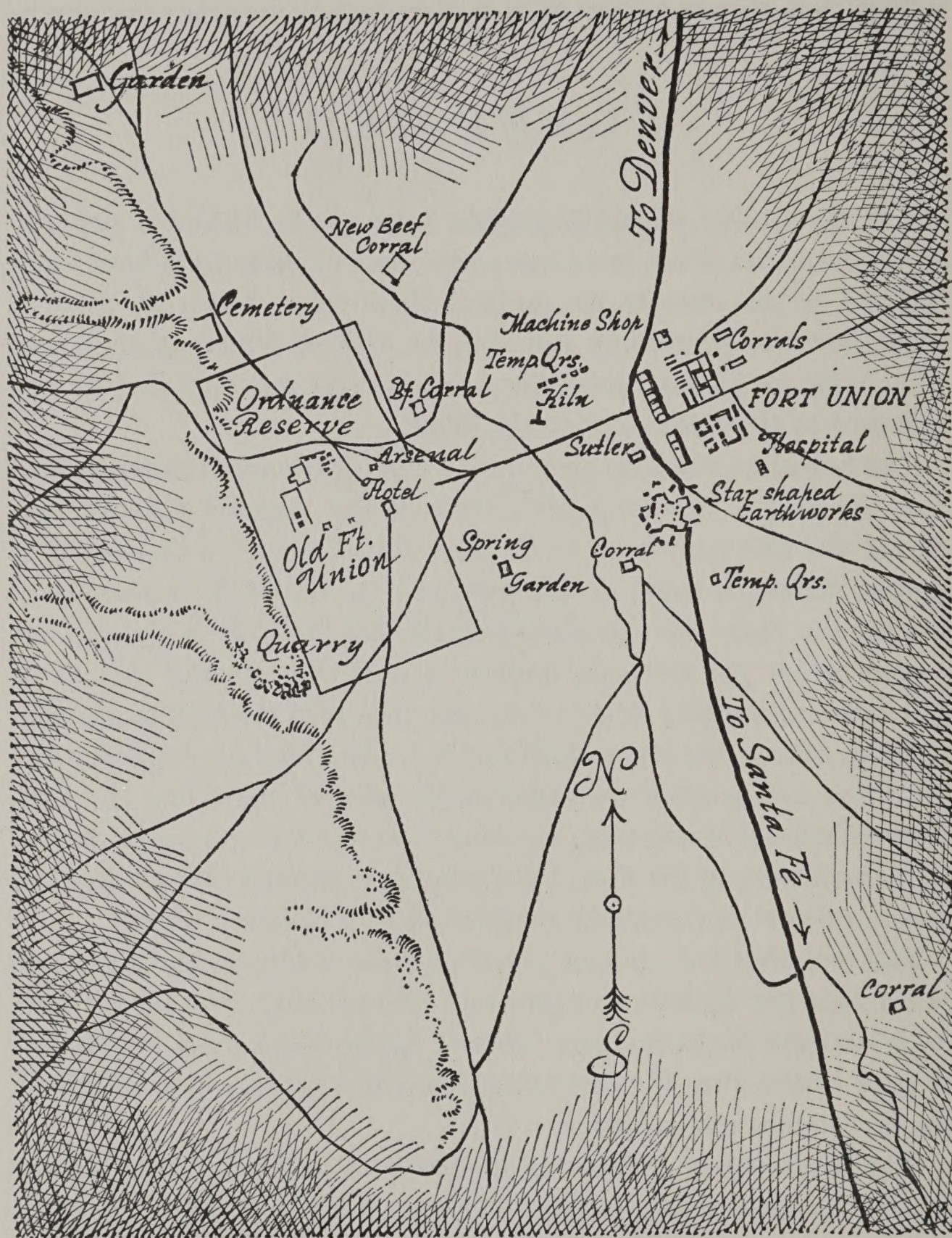
MILITARY FORTS played important roles in the historical pageant of the American West. In recent years some of these forts have been restored in an attempt to applaud their roles. James W. Arrott's enthusiasm for preserving the remains of Fort Union grew as the knowledge he gleaned from his extensive research revealed its importance to the settlement of the West.

The casual tourist who visits Fort Union National Monument and sees the plaque honoring Mr. Arrott at the Visitor's Center asks: "What did this man have to do with Fort Union?" The answer is simple. Although many people from time to time talked about preserving the Fort (Jim was always reminding me "talk is cheap") the project never got seriously underway until Jim cleared the air of idle talk and buckled down to carrying the idea through to success. Jim was always the last to take credit for the final accomplishment, but those who worked with him on the project know that the Fort Union National Monument, in a way, is as much a monument to Jim as to the history of the Fort. His enthusiasm created the momentum, and the thrust to transform speculation into concrete reality.

The text that follows was prepared from a tape recording made at the time the Address was given on July 15, 1957. The tape is now on permanent file in Rodgers Library. Appended is a brief summary of Fort Union, Inc., the instrument by which success in establishing the Monument was achieved.

The feasibility of publishing this address was the subject of my last conversation with Jim shortly before his death on March 6, 1959.

WILLIAM S. WALLACE
Librarian and Archivist
Rodgers Library



MAP DRAWN IN 1866 OF THE
MILITARY RESERVATION AT
FORT UNION, NEW MEXICO

Mr. Arrott:

IN SPEAKING to you about the Military History of New Mexico and the History of Fort Union, we could choose no more appropriate spot to discuss this subject than where we are now gathered. We are literally standing and sitting in the ruts of the Santa Fé Trail. That Trail extended from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fé, New Mexico, a distance of some 700 odd miles. Two hundred yards to the west lies the town of Old Las Vegas, the first community between Independence, Missouri and Santa Fé. On this very spot countless wagon trains encamped, countless pack trains unloaded, here horses and mules were taken down to the Gallinas River for water, fires were lit and camps were made. The lights here, with a little imagination, could be camp fires of the old wagon trains on the Santa Fé Trail.

Twenty miles to the north of us is the junction of two branches of the Santa Fé Trail. Refreshing your memory, the Santa Fé Trail started at Independence, Missouri. Just west of Dodge City, it branched into two traces. One cut across Kansas, Oklahoma, and a corner of New Mexico near Wagon Mound. It was joined by the other trace of the Santa Fé Trail which came over Raton Pass near Watrous, at the junction of the two rivers, the Mora and the Sapello, was one of the most strategic spots in this area. This was the spot which later was chosen as the Headquarters of the Army of New Mexico.

Before going into the Military History of New Mexico, I feel it necessary to give you the background of the cause for the various forts located at different spots in New Mexico, and in particular, why Fort Union was selected as the Headquarters; why the Arsenal was located there; why the Quartermaster Department for this entire area was there; why the Military Prison; and why the General Hospital.

The War with Mexico, which occurred in 1846 and was finished in 1848, gave the United States a tremendous territory. It gave us California, and all of New Mexico, Arizona, the southern part of

Colorado as far as the town of Pueblo, the southern part of Utah, and the southern part of Nevada. This territory was conquered by Col. Stephen Watts Kearny, who was designated to form the Army of the West and to march from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fé. From there he was to continue on to California and help in its subjugation. Part of his troops were to go directly south from Santa Fé to Chihuahua and engage in the activities there.

General Kearny was promoted to Brig. General just as he arrived in Las Vegas, on August the 15th, 1846. He went over into Old Town Plaza, issued a Proclamation to all of the native New Mexicans that this area now belonged to the United States, that the native people no longer owed allegiance to Mexico, and hereafter they were to obey the Laws of the United States of America. Kearny then went on to Santa Fé. On the evening of August 18th, he slept in the Governor's Palace, and for the first time the American Flag flew over the Plaza of Santa Fé. It was a conquest without any bloodshed. I will not say that all of the people of New Mexico received him gladly. That would be too much to expect. Gen. Kearny left Santa Fé on September 25th, and proceeded on his way to California and helped in its capture.

About the first of November 1846, there were rumors of a dissatisfied element in Santa Fé, Taos, Mora, and Las Vegas, that contemplated rebellion against the United States' forces. The details of this rebellion were discovered and as it had been planned to have the native forces of the dissatisfied element capture all of the American soldiers and civilians on December 19th, they postponed their plans until December 24, 1846. The rebellion was not a success, but on January 19, 1847, it did gain headway in Taos. The Governor of New Mexico, Charles Bent, appointed by General Kearny, was massacred and scalped. Numerous others, Americans, and some native New Mexicans friendly to the United States' occupation were also killed. The United States' forces quickly learned of this in Santa Fé. The troops were organized promptly. They marched from Santa Fé; and on February 4, 1847, the battle at the Pueblo of Taos occurred.

At that battle in which regular troops were engaged, Volunteer New Mexicans, many of them Spanish-American New Mexicans who welcomed the United States forces, captured the entire Pueblo of Taos, slew many of the Indians, captured most of the ring leaders (eight or nine of them were hanged) and the rebellion in Taos was squelched. That rebellion, however, spread to Mora.

A military detachment from Las Vegas attempted to squelch the rebellion in Mora, but a United States Army Officer, Captain Henry, and six of his men were killed. Three days later a large detachment from Las Vegas went to Mora. It completely confused the insurgents, burned the town, and stopped the rebellion in-so-far as Mora was concerned. There were refugees of the discontented group who went further east beyond Wagon Mound (Santa Clara). And on the Canadian River at about the present crossing between Wagon Mound and Roy, a sharp engagement occurred between Major Edmundson's regulars, and the rebellious individuals. No decision was reached. The rebels then went south of Las Vegas. They were pursued to Anton Chico, and up the Pecos River, but were stopped at the village now known as Villanueva, at that time called La Questa. Here the ring leaders were captured. Many of them were executed, and some were sent to Santa Fé; and the entire rebellion ended.

As a result of these disturbances, troops of the regular United States Army of Occupation were stationed in the principal towns of New Mexico. They were, at that time, Santa Fé, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, Taos, Doña Ana (just north of Las Cruces), Socorro, Rayado (which was a small settlement near where Cimarron now stands), and Cebolleta (which was located just north of highway 66 about half-way between Albuquerque and Grants). All of the troops were located in these villages. In Old Las Vegas, there was a post of some 200 regular army men.

This period immediately following the trouble in Taos resulted in other activities, principally against the Navajo Indians. They were probably the most ferocious Indians in New Mexico at the time. With the exception of Socorro, there were very few communities

south of Albuquerque to El Paso. As a result, the trouble with the Apache Indians did not take place until a later date. Between 1846, the time of the War with Mexico, and 1851, which is the date of the founding of Fort Union, there were four to six campaigns conducted against the Navajo Indians. All of these were unsuccessful in-so-far as the United States troops were concerned. The forces of the United States would catch up with the Indians, there would be a slight engagement, the Indians would be very glad to make a treaty, and as soon as the United States troops had withdrawn to their respective posts, the Indians resumed their old business of raiding the settlements.

That brings us up to the period of the founding of Fort Union which was in 1851. At that time, there was a change in policy of the military leaders in Washington. It was decided that instead of having troops stationed in the small towns in New Mexico, they would be taken mostly from these villages and placed in forts where better discipline could be maintained, and where the soldiers would not be subject to the distractions commonly found in the early New Mexican towns. As a result, a military post was established at a distance of eight miles south of Taos, known as Cantonment Burgwin. It is right at the very site of the lumber mill as you come into Taos on route No. 3. A fort was established at El Paso (at that time called Franklin). There was another fort built north of the present Fort Garland, which was known as Fort Massachusetts. South of Socorro, a fort was built on the river known as Fort Conrad, changed some four years later to Fort Craig. In the Navajo Country, about on the Arizona and New Mexico line north of Gallup, Fort Defiance was established, and over all of these forts at the junction of the two traces of the Santa Fé Trail, near Watrous, Fort Union was established.

Fort Union was the big post. As I mentioned briefly, it had the Arsenal where all of the guns, the ammunition, and the cannons were stored for distribution to the other posts. It had the Quartermaster Department which had all of the clothing and supplies for the enlisted men. It had the Commissary and Subsistence which



BVT. LT. COL.
EDMOND B. ALEXANDER
First Dragoons

*First Commanding Officer
of Fort Union (1851)
during the original
construction*

LT. COL. W. A. M. DUDLEY
Ninth Cavalry

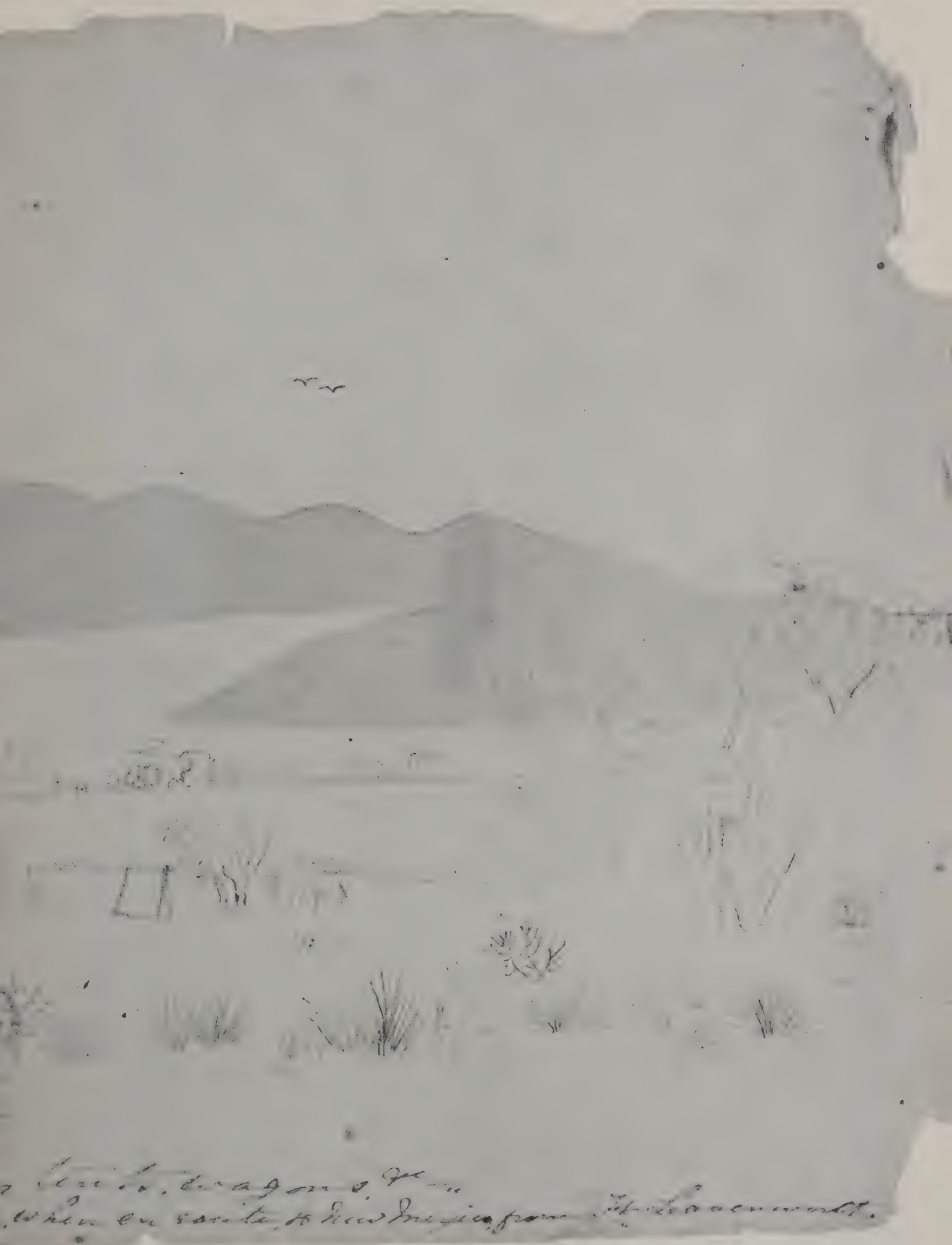
*Commanding Officer at
various times from
1876 to 1880*

*(prominent in the
Lincoln County War)*

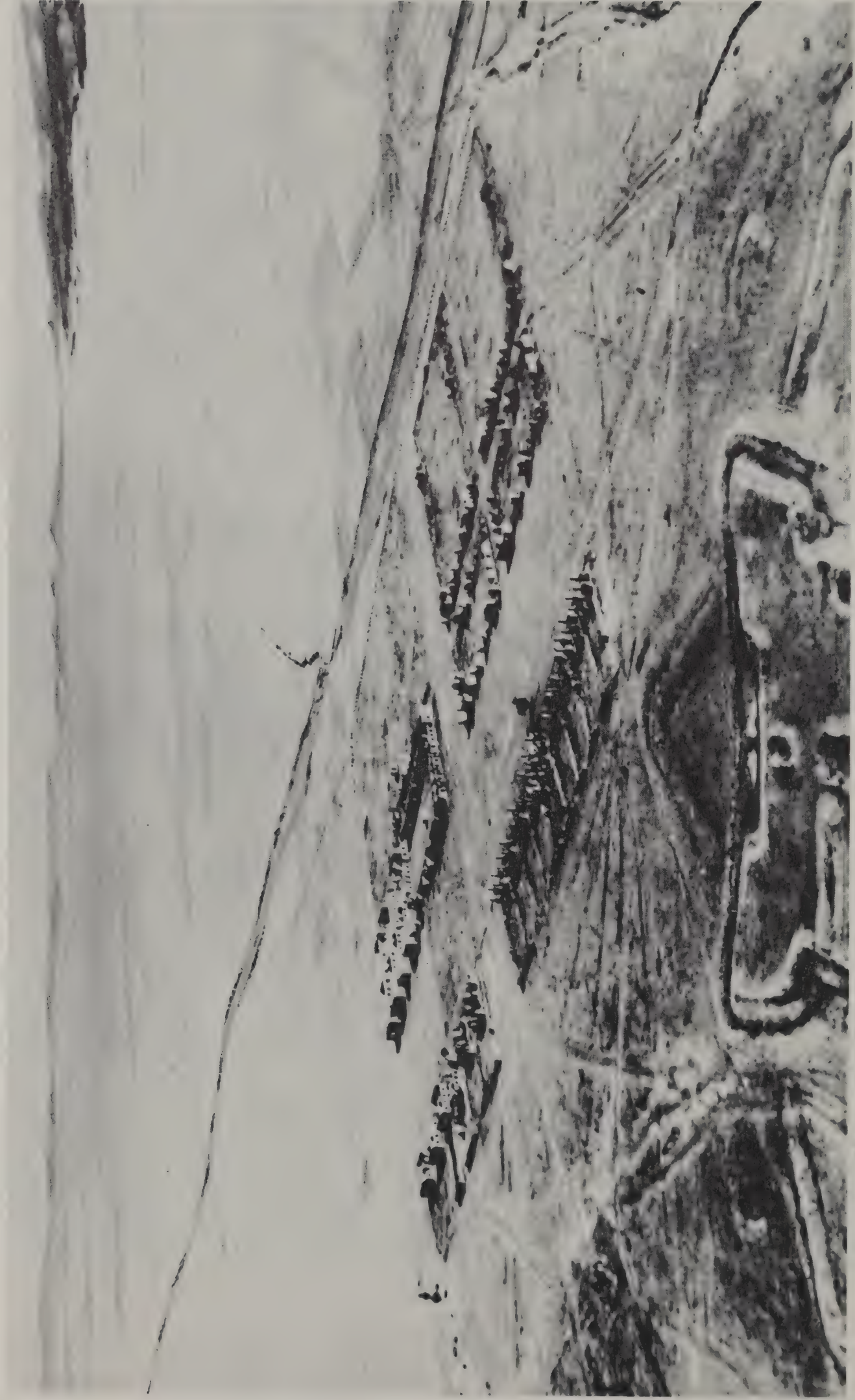




"OUR TENTS were pitched in full view of Fisher's Peak in 1866, and we remained a day in the pretty camp. A soldier drew a picture of it for one of the children, which is still in my possession. Our own tents, wagons, ambulance, and buggy made a little village by themselves,



and I have a feeling of homesickness when I look at my picture."
From, *I Married a Soldier; or Old Days in the Old Army*, by Lydia
Spencer Lane (Philadelphia, 1893). The date on the sketch is in error.
(Reproduced from the original in the Arrott Collection.)



AERIAL VIEW OF RUINS (circa 1930) – The streaks in the upper area are traces of wagon tracks of the old Santa Fé Trail, still visible after more than 100 years. Star-shaped fortifications built during the Civil War are seen at bottom center; Turkey Mountains on the horizon.

handled the food supplies for both men and animals, and remember, that was in the days of horses and mules, and a great amount of hay and grain was necessary to maintain these animals. It also had a very fine little hospital for that day — the first hospital, I believe, in New Mexico. It was also designated as the place to take the most dangerous military prisoners, and there the Military Prison for this area was established. All of this was done by Col. Sumner, a very fine United States Army Officer. He established Fort Union in July of 1851, when he withdrew all of the troops from Las Vegas, from Rayado, and other places, and marched them to the present site of Fort Union.

During the life of Fort Union, there were three distinct Fort Unions. The one established in 1851 that I have just told you about, a second one built about a mile away in 1861, and the third one, the ruins of which you now see at the Monument, was begun about 1863 and completed in 1866. My talk to you will emphasize the first two Fort Unions. In the case of the third one, information is more readily obtainable, and if you are interested in the subject, books are available which will tell you about the ruins which you can see if you go to the Mounment. What you cannot see are the first two Fort Unions, and we are now discussing the one which was built in the summer of 1851. That is generally known as Old Fort Union. It was the one established to guard the Santa Fé Trail, and to guard the community of Las Vegas. From it radiated many of the activities of the New Mexico of that day. There was an old saying that all roads led to Fort Union. If you will fly over Fort Union you will see that roads came from north, east, south, and west. The ruts are still plainly visible. From this Old Fort Union, many of the greatest soldiers who became famous in the Civil War got their training. But contrary to popular belief Generals Grant and Lee were never there during war time. General Grant had resigned from the Army in the fifties and General Lee was in Texas. From this post numerous Indian expeditions started.

In 1854 the Commanding Officer, Col. Phillip St. George Cooke

led an expedition against the southern Apache Indians known as the Jicarilla Apaches, who went on the war path and attacked a large detachment of the regular troops stationed at Cantonment Burgwin near Taos. About forty soldiers were killed at the present town of Pilar on the Rio Grande — you've passed it many times. It was one of the most disastrous defeats the United States forces ever suffered in New Mexico. Cooke caught up with the Apaches, and during this campaign with his head guide, Kit Carson, gave the Jicarilla Apache Indians such a severe beating they were never again a serious problem in-so-far as the Indian Wars were concerned.

The next Commanding Officer was a Col. T. T. Fauntleroy, who marched as far as the present town of Pueblo, Colorado, in December of 1854. He attacked the Ute Indians, who had conducted a massacre in that area. During 1857 and 1858 the Mormon War was on, and troops from Fort Union marched in the columns which went on the Northern Trail as far as Salt Lake City. In 1858 another campaign was instigated against the Navajoes, who had become very unruly. This campaign was unsuccessful. The Navajoes made a treaty and as soon as the American forces had returned to their posts, they immediately started raiding again. A similar expedition was led by Col. Canby in 1859 and 1860, this was also a failure.

During this period there was stationed at Fort Union an individual officer who I think is very interesting. His name was Jonathan Letterman. The Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco is named for him. He is the individual who ranks with Walter Reed as a most important man in the Medical Corps of the United States Army. This same Surgeon Letterman, who was stationed at Fort Union in 1856, has two living daughters in Albuquerque. They are very elderly ladies. They are both living in the Presbyterian Hospital there.

This brings us up to the Civil War days at Fort Union, and they in themselves are a very interesting and exciting period at Fort Union and throughout all New Mexico. These years I term 1861 to 1866, and this was during the period of the Second Fort Union. The first Fort Union was built on the side of a hill. With the approach

of the Civil War, and it was known that the Confederate forces would invade New Mexico, it was decided that the first Fort Union would not be defensible. As a result, the first Fort Union was abandoned and the second Fort Union, closely adjoining the ruins which you can now see, was constructed in the summer of 1861. This fort was built in the shape of a large star. From the air it is easily seen. The buildings were half submerged in the ground. It was less than a mile from the side of the hill and very close to the present ruins. This fort was defended against the Confederate invasion which came in 1862. At this time, most of the regular forces in New Mexico, the regular Army men, were withdrawn for the more important battles in the east. The defense of New Mexico was largely left to Volunteers from New Mexico, California and Colorado.

The Confederate soldiers won every battle, but they lost the campaign. The Confederate soldiers headed for Fort Union. All of the food supplies for the soldiers, mules and horses were almost captured. As you know, the Confederates were defeated at Glorieta Pass, but before they were defeated there, they defeated the United States forces at Fort Craig south of Socorro. They captured Albuquerque, and Santa Fé, and were on their way to capture Fort Union. They were stopped by a flanking movement of the troops of the United States which got to the rear of the Confederate forces right at the beginning of Apache Canyon. The Confederate supply train was at that point. All of their wagons were burned, the mules and horses were bayoneted, and the Confederate army retreated in disorder and left the state very quickly.

During these battles one of our New Mexicans, Col. Kit Carson, gained great stature. He was in all of these battles. Immediately after the Confederates withdrew from Glorieta through Santa Fé, Albuquerque, and El Paso, Kit Carson was placed in charge of the New Mexico Volunteers, who by that time had become seasoned troops. These New Mexico Volunteers were mostly of Spanish-American descent who remained loyal to the Union. Kit Carson was the Colonel of the regiment.

The Indians in the South, the Mescalero Indians near Fort Stanton, were the first to go on the warpath, and Colonel Carson was sent to subjugate them. He did a thorough job. From there he was sent to Fort Defiance to subjugate the Navajoes, and he did such a thorough job that the Navajoes were never a factor in any Indian War in the future. Carson was criticized for his methods, but the results were perfect. After the Navajo encounter, he was sent east to the Canadian River just north of where Tucumcari now stands, to fight the Kiowa and Comanche Indians, who had been menacing the trade on the Santa Fé Trail. These he severely beat in a battle known as the First Battle of Adobe Walls, located on the Canadian River. Since Kit Carson went through all of these campaigns, he returned a tired man. He was then promoted to a brigadier general, and for a time was the Commanding Officer of Fort Union and later of Fort Garland. A year or two later he died in Colorado at Fort Lyon, which is just above La Junta, Colorado.

During this period an outpost was established south of Fort Union named Fort Sumner, near the present town of Fort Sumner. At this location all of the Navajo Indians were placed (the first concentration camp in the United States). It was a miserable camp where thousands of them died. This is a blot on the record of the history of our military forces.

About 1866 the existing Fort Union, the ruins of which you can now see, was completed. On December 24, 1866, the Commanding Officer, Bvt. Col. E. G. Marshall, was notified that his residence was completed and he could move in, which he did the next day (Christmas).

With this came the end of the second Fort Union, the one the remains of which can be seen clearly only from the sky. The guides at the Monument will show you where it is and you will realize what it was like when you are walking over it. There is only one picture available of the first Fort Union and that is a photograph of a drawing, and does not give a very clear idea of what the first and second Fort Unions looked like. Neither of the Fort Unions was the type of a fort that you may visualize as a frontier fort, with high walls around

it, with parapets on the corners and with towers at the ends with cannons. Fort Union was too large for that. It never had a wall around it — it more nearly resembled a frontier village.

The heyday of the Fort Union that we know was from 1866, the date of its completion, until the coming of the railroad in 1879 to Las Vegas. The coming of that railroad was the death knell of the third Fort Union. From this Fort Union the first campaign was to be launched against the Kiowa and Comanche Indians, who had been causing so much trouble, principally in Texas. They raided the Texas towns, captured stock — even children — and brought them over to this area, and sold them. Slavery existed at that time in New Mexico. Children were bought and sold the same as Negroes were in the South; in fact, slavery in New Mexico continued longer than Negro slavery did in the South.

Another outpost of Fort Union was established in 1863, on the Canadian River just north of Tucumcari. This was known as Fort Bascom, a small outpost which was fed and staffed from Fort Union. It was the headquarters for all of the campaigns against the Kiowas and the Comanche Indians.

Also during this period were the activities in Lincoln County and Cimarron, which were the two wild towns of New Mexico. They were the places where most of the outlaws gathered, where most of the cattle rustling occurred, and where most of the violence seemed to start. Cimarron was staffed by a detachment of soldiers from Fort Union, and to combat the violence in the area around the town of Lincoln, Fort Stanton was established at quite an early date. The Mescalero Indian reservation was located nearby. Both of these areas were serviced by the merchants of Las Vegas, both of these posts were satellite posts of Fort Union. The activities between Fort Union down to Fort Sumner on to Fort Stanton, to Cimarron, made Fort Union at that time a very busy and active post. Wagon trains were arriving daily from the East. From Fort Union, wagon trains went as far as Tucson, Arizona. Goods were bought at Fort Union and shipped all over New Mexico and Arizona by wagon trains. It was

its heyday, but the railroad coming through was the first gong of the death knell of Fort Union. When it passed by Fort Union, no longer was it necessary to have an arsenal near the present post of Fort Union. It was abandoned in 1882. It was much easier to send arms, ammunition and cannon by train. The soldiers from then on moved by train, not by wagon train or marching. They were entrained at Watrous and sent to any of the hot spots in New Mexico.

By 1881 the Santa Fé Railroad had joined the Southern Pacific at Deming, New Mexico. All of the Indians, with the exception of a small group of Utes on the Colorado-New Mexico line, and the Apaches in the South were subjugated. Fort Union was on the way out — but it was still a popular place. The life between 1880 and the closing year of 1891 was full of social activity. Officers spent their leaves there. There was tennis, dramatics, and daily band concerts. It was a wonderful place for officers to go. The quarters were good. There was a nice hotel there. Las Vegas was in its heyday. Soldiers came down to Las Vegas in the '80's to the Plaza Hotel. At that time it was a very popular resort. Montezuma Hot Springs was prosperous. General Grant did come to Fort Union as a visitor—never as an army officer. Fort Union's years were full of army red tape, brass, social life, and pretty women — it was gay. It died a slow death. But the end finally came. The Apaches were subjugated in 1886 in Arizona. Geronimo had been moved to Florida. There was no reason for Fort Union. Finally, after much controversy in Congress and among the high military brass, it was abandoned in the spring of 1891.

I haven't mentioned to you that Fort Union stood on private ground, the Mora Grant. When it was established there, no one realized it was on private property. When it was abandoned, the soldiers marched out leaving almost everything there. That is why so many of the houses in the Watrous area have windows, doors, vigas, and other things from Fort Union. It was looted. But in the passing of Fort Union there is still romance, there is still glamour.

I don't know the details of how the Fort Union reservation was

acquired by General Benjamin Butler, whose descendents today still own the property. I will get to that some day, but that will be probably in two or three years. There is a story regarding it. General Benjamin Butler was a Union officer in the Civil War. He was a governor of Massachusetts. He acquired large holdings in Mora County, which included the entire fort military reservation. His heirs still own that property. His heirs were most gracious in donating to the Federal Government 720 acres and the right-of-way to the site for the establishment of this National Monument. Without their generosity, without their aid, this could never have been accomplished. They did it graciously. They are still doing everything they can to make Fort Union National Monument the historic shrine it should be, and to make it such a popular place that it will benefit all of the people of Las Vegas and surrounding area.

If you have not been to Fort Union National Monument, please go. I have enjoyed the research that I have made on the military history of New Mexico, with Fort Union as the focal point. I have enjoyed it so much that I hope I will be able to complete the research and have it deposited in the Rodgers Library in Las Vegas, New Mexico, where it belongs, and where it can be enjoyed by serious students of this subject.

A P P E N D I X

FORT UNION, INCORPORATED

(R. E. Thompson to W. S. Wallace)

August 18, 1960

DEAR BILL:

These notes are set down as I comb through the files, with no attempt at logical order, but should give you the desired information.

We were incorporated on January 6, 1954, under the Laws of the State of New Mexico. Necessary legal advice and assistance was contributed free of charge by Waldo Spiess.

Through the efforts of the Late John J. Dempsey, Congressman from New Mexico, Public Law 429, the establishment of Fort Union National Monument was Approved June 28, 1954.

In January 1954, incorporators met and elected the following officers: Ross E. Thompson, President; James W. Arrott, 1st Vice President; W. A. Keleher, Vice President and Historical Consultant; Alex Barnes, Vice President in charge of publicity; Lewis Schiele, Secretary and Treasurer; Governor Edwin L. Mechem, Honorary Vice President; Congressman John J. Dempsey, Honorary Vice President; Arthur Prager, Honorary Vice President. At this meeting, the majority present insisted that Mr. Arrott be named President of the Corporation, for the reason that he had been more active than anyone else in getting this Corporation formed. However, Mr. Arrott would not accept, and prevailed upon the members to elect Ross Thompson President, and to let him serve as 1st Vice President. In that capacity, he continued to be more active and influential than anyone else in the Corporation.

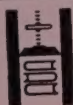
The Fort site was located on land belonging to the Union Land and Grazing Company. That Company wanted \$20,000 for damages that would result from having grazing areas blocked by a public highway. The Corporation raised and paid to the Company \$10,000 while the Mora County Commissioners were instrumental in a State Highway appropriation for an additional \$10,000, which was paid to the Company. In return for this the Company, through its representative Andrew Marshall, Jr., donated the actual site of the Fort.

Sincerely,

ROSS E. THOMPSON



HECKMAN
BINDERY INC.



APR 98

Bound-To-Pleas[®] N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA 46962

